
Communities@State questionnaire

Bureau of Information Resource Management, Office of eDiplomacy, February 2008

A community requires a significant commitment of time and resources so it is important to clarify what you want to achieve, how you plan to run the community and how you plan to win and sustain support for it. This questionnaire will help you to shape and guide your plans, and it will give eDiplomacy input on setting up and supporting your community.

Starting a community is an experiment. Moreover, communities evolve, changing to meet new circumstances. That said, it is important to be as specific as possible in answering the following “start-up” questions. Your chances for success are much better if you know who you want to reach, what you want to do for them (and vice versa), how you will measure success, and how you and colleagues will manage the effort.

Experience also shows that it is important early on to secure executive buy-in for your effort. Your supervisors need to understand and support your efforts and accept the goals of increased information-sharing. If not, you and we will waste time and resources setting up a community that cannot be launched or sustained.

Section One (“Issues for Planning Your Community”) below briefly discusses important considerations about the community. Section Two contains the Questionnaire itself. Please type your responses directly into the Questionnaire and return it to the Office of eDiplomacy.

Issues for Planning Your Community

Strategic Issues

GOALS: What do you want your community to achieve? Please be specific: for example, instead of "Sharing information," you might put "To provide a forum for reporting officers in our South America posts to share information on political trends." If there are multiple purposes, please list all of them. The greater the sense that your community makes a difference to its participants and has an impact in the organization, the greater the chances for success (and the more rewarding it will be to participate). The following suggestions are illustrative:

- Publish information
- Generate discussions about issues or events



- Provide a place for colleagues to make and answer requests for help
- Develop “best practice” solutions
- Develop a network of interested and knowledgeable people

DURATION: How long will your community last? Will it run for a fixed period and then be retired and archived; run for a trial period and then be extended if successful; or run indefinitely?

PARTICIPANTS: Who should participate in the community? You should try to identify a primary group whom you wish to participate actively in the community by providing content and commentary. Then think of additional target audiences. The primary participants and additional audiences may be in State, other agencies, or both. The answers to these questions will affect your outreach activities and may determine which of several networks should host your community.

EXCLUSIONS: Is there anyone you do *not* want to participate? Our communities are based on web logs, which essentially are open forums. Communities in Communities @ State will be accessible at a minimum to State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development personnel. Most will also be available to the U.S. Government (USG) interagency community on unclassified or classified government networks. If you need to restrict State or USG access to your discussions, other technologies may better fit your needs. The Communities @ State program does not encompass public-facing communities on the Internet.

MARKETING: How will you publicize your community? Some suggestions: advertising on listservs; posting links on Web sites you control, or asking for links on other sites; including its address in your office’s e-mail signatures; including the address in cables you send; e-mailing people privately; Department Notices. (eDiplomacy will make a sustained effort to promote online communities in general, but you will have to promote your community individually.)

DEFINING SUCCESS: How will you know you’re succeeding? The measures below are illustrative. You should develop relevant, clearly defined, specific and measurable goals for your specific community.

- Grow to XX visits per month by the end of six months.
- Regularly engage at least XX people from key audiences/organizations in discussion groups by the end of six months.
- Provide expert response to all requests for help within 24 hours.
- Based on queries and discussions, propose three new “best practices” every year.
- Use comments and discussions to develop ideas for at least one in-depth report or analysis each quarter.
- Survey community members once a year.
- Candidates for assignments cite participation in/management of the community as a factor in their bidding.

Content Issues

NAME: What do you want to call your community? You can use a formal name, or you can use a catchy name that people will remember. eDiplomacy will review the suggested name to ensure that it appropriately projects the scope and purpose of the community, facilitates design and operation of the community site, and is compatible with other initiatives and programs.

OTHER RESOURCES: What links do you want to display on the sidebar? These are static links that will not change without changing the template. They should be to sites and/or documents that are of enduring importance.

LOGO: Do you wish to include an official logo or other graphic? We encourage displaying an official logo or other distinctive graphic at the top of the community site, and using photos, charts and other graphics to tell your story. However, the logo or graphics must be reasonable in size. Many diplomatic posts have limited bandwidth, and the "heavier" the pages are with graphics, the harder it is for those posts to look at your page.

ORGANIZING CONTENT: What topics will you use to organize your content? The web logs' items are divided into topics. Please list the topics you want to start with (you can always add more). Five to ten topics are fine for most web logs.

Management Issues

Most communities use two basic categories of participants. *Administrators* can add or delete "entries" and comments and modify the community homepage; they require a password to log in. *Readers* can comment on articles – they do not need to log in to leave a comment – but otherwise have no capability to alter the blog.

If useful, you can add two other categories of participants. *Authors* can log in and contribute an entry but otherwise cannot modify the community blog. *Guests* may provide an entry without logging in. The choices you make on these categories will depend on the degree of access you are willing to grant others to encourage content and participation in your community. As *administrator*, you always retain ultimate control over (and responsibility for) your site.

WHO WILL RUN IT? Who is the primary community administrator? How much time are you willing to spend per week administering the web log?

WHO IS/ARE THE SECONDARY COMMUNITY ADMINISTRATOR(S)? Each community should have at least one alternate administrator. We encourage you to have even more, to share the workload of managing the community, to ensure that requirements for community site supervision are met, and to increase participation. However, please name only people who will actually manage the community. (Please note that people who leave comments to articles on the web log are not considered "users" for licensing terms.)

MANAGING CONTENT: How often do you plan to post new content? Generally, it is better to post your content as short items more frequently, rather than long or many items less frequently. If you are only able to post content periodically, this should be explained on the community site.

MANAGING EXCHANGES: How do you plan to manage comments, questions and discussions? A major distinction between a blog-based community and a regular website is the blog's capability to serve as a forum for comments, questions, and threaded discussions. This provides an important opportunity and imposes a responsibility. As a community administrator, how will you encourage people to participate actively? Moreover, you should plan to intervene actively to initiate a discussion or draw it in fruitful directions, and to answer questions promptly. In addition, 5 FAM 777 requires the community administrator to check the community site at least once every business day. [NOTE for non-State readers: This refers to the Foreign Affairs Manual section that concerns blogs, wikis and other collaborative tools. It is publicly available from the State Department public website at www.state.gov – just type 5 FAM 777 in the search box.]

EXECUTIVE SUPPORT: How do you plan to achieve and show your supervisors' support? You will need your leaders' support for your work on and goals for the community. Before you and eDiplomacy commit the time and resources fully to develop the community site, you should discuss the project with your supervisors, ensure that they are comfortable with the time you will spend on it, with the overall goals, and with the practical aspects of a community that is open to a potentially large and general Department or interagency audience.

The Questionnaire

Strategic Issues

1. GOALS: What do you want your community to achieve?
2. DURATION: How long will your community last?
3. PARTICIPANTS: Who are the primary community participants and, if appropriate, additional audiences you want to engage in the community?
4. NETWORK: Considering your intended audience, choose one of the three networks on which to host your community:
 - ☐ **Unclassified interagency network.** State Department users have automatic access.
 - ☐ **Unclassified State Department intranet.** Includes people with access to this network, i.e., State Department personnel and most USAID personnel.
 - ☐ **Classified interagency network.** Available to USG personnel cleared up to the secret level.
5. EXCLUSIONS: Unless specifically designated for public access, your community will be internal to State or the USG. Is there anyone in State or other USG agencies that you do *not* want to participate?
6. MARKETING: How will you publicize your community?
7. DEFINING SUCCESS: How will you know you're succeeding?
8. LAUNCH DATE: When do you want to announce your community to your audience?

Content Issues

9. NAME: What do you want to call your community?
10. OTHER RESOURCES: What links do you want to display on the sidebar?
11. LOGO: Do you have an existing logo or graphic that you wish to use on your community site? (If not, the Communities team will work with you to make one.)
12. ORGANIZING CONTENT: What topics will you use to organize your content?

Management Issues

13. WHO WILL RUN THE COMMUNITY?
- Who is the primary community administrator and how much time are you willing to spend per week administering the community?
 - Who is/are the secondary community administrator(s) [people who will actually contribute entries and manage the community]?
14. MANAGING CONTENT: How often do you plan to post new content?
15. MANAGING EXCHANGES: How do you plan to manage comments, questions and discussions?
16. EXECUTIVE SUPPORT: Does your supervisor support this initiative?

Site Features

Please indicate which of the following features you wish to add to your community:

- ☐ **Subscriptions:** Allow readers to add themselves to your automatic notification email list when new entries are posted to the site.

- ☐ **Guest entries:** Allow readers to post a new entry without logging in. By adding this feature, you relinquish some immediate control over addition of content to your site although you retain ultimate authority to delete material. The benefit of this feature is that it enables others to participate more fully in the community by initiating content and discussions, without adding to the task of administering passwords.
- ☐ **Automatic notifications:** Send an automatic email to entire notification list each time a new entry is posted. Note that if you intend to post frequently, you may flood your readers' inboxes. If you do not select this option, you always have the choice to send out notifications to individuals or groups on an entry-by-entry basis.
- ☐ **Upcoming Events:** Show an "Upcoming Events" subsection in a sidebar that highlights events that are important to your community.
- ☐ **Tagline:** Explain the purpose of your site in a short, pithy statement that appears on each page, just below the site name and logo. If you want a tagline, please include it here:
- ☐ **"About this site" page** - add a permanent link to an entry which describes your site.
-OR-
- ☐ **Welcome message** - include a short message (photograph optional) to appear on the main page only. A good technique to increase and demonstrate executive buy-in to the community is to get your leader – the Ambassador or Deputy Chief of Mission, your Assistant Secretary or relevant Deputy Assistant Secretary – to provide a welcome message for the site.
- ☐ **Newsfeeds** - add headlines to your site with RSS feeds. Please indicate which feeds you'd like, if any).
- ☐ **Logo** - help "brand" your office or initiative by including a logo at the top of each page. You will need to provide a .JPG or .GIF file of your logo.
- ☐ **Design details** – further your branding by requesting particular colors or fonts for your site. Please indicate here:
- ☐ **Publicity** - increase your audience with a link to your site on various State resources, including the Department wiki, intranet home page, and the Communities @ State home page.